

as support dictators in Latin America like Maduro, Ortega, and the Castro/Diaz-Canel regime. If America and our freedom-loving partners are going to truly stand for democracy, we cannot do so while lining the pockets of those who seek to actively destroy liberty and independence wherever it exists.

Whether we like it or not, we need to recognize the evil in our world. It exists in the Governments of communist China, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Russia. They want a different world, one where the enemies of democracy, human rights, and sovereign nations issue the orders and the United States and our allies do what we are told. They will bully and crush anyone in their way if they are allowed. I, for one—and I know I am not alone—will not accept this.

Out of this terrible conflict, America has an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the security and independence of democratic nations, strengthen our energy and industrial independence and partnerships with fellow democracies, and stop genocide, renewing the promise of “never again.” We cannot allow this moment to pass without creating this need to change. The survival of democracy and the United States depends on it.

I yield the floor.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from Virginia.

**ROBB ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SHOOTING**

**Mr. Kaine.** Mr. President, I rise to just share candid emotions about yesterday's tragic shooting of schoolchildren who were 2 days from the end of the school year in Texas—19 deaths of little ones and 2 teachers and others injured. This is rough. I don't have any notes because I am really emotional about it. These shootings kind of give me PTSD, I have to admit.

I was the mayor of Richmond, and our city had the second highest homicide rate in the United States. At a much younger period of my life, I found myself going to too many funerals, to too many wakes, to maybe the most memorable crime scenes, then also to homicide victims' family support group meetings in church basements in my city.

Then I got to be the Governor of Virginia. In April of 2007, my wife and I landed in Japan while leading a trade mission, and we went to a hotel and immediately got a phone call saying that there was a shooting underway on the campus of Virginia Tech University and that I should turn on CNN, which I did, in Japan.

As I saw the events unfold, I said: Take us right back to the airport.

We had flown 14 hours. We were in the hotel for about an hour but went right back to the airport and flew all the way back home to what was the worst day of my life in trying to comfort 32 family members who had lost kids or their spouses who were faculty members—and that process went on for years—in the days right after the horrible tragedy but then commissioning a

study about what went wrong and then trying to find an appropriate settlement with these families that would honor their loved ones.

I had to deal with State police officers—hardened, hardened law enforcement veterans—who walked into the classrooms at Virginia Tech, to find carnage and on each body a cell phone ringing because a parent had seen it on television and wanted to call to make sure it wasn't one of their children who had been killed. My law enforcement officers talked about how those rings that would never be answered just haunted them, haunted them.

So when there are these shootings at a school, at a nightclub, at a concert, in a grocery store, in a church, in a synagogue, I feel like I am back in April of 2007, experiencing those emotions for the first time.

I was analyzing my own emotions for the first time last night. Why have I not been able to reach a point of more—I don't know—emotional equilibrium about this after 15 years? I realized that the reason was that my emotional reaction that is kind of a PTSD thing is not just because of the shootings, not just because of the deaths, not just because of the promising lives cut short; it is compounded by a realization that, here in this body, we have done nothing.

It would be bad enough to experience the violence and be reminded of that most painful time in my life, but to experience it as a U.S. Senator, as a Member of a body, and to say, “Well, what have we done? We didn't do anything at the Federal level after Virginia Tech, and we didn't do anything after Pulse, and we didn't do anything after Las Vegas, and we didn't do anything after Sandy Hook, and we didn't do anything after one tragedy after the next,” then that compounds in some ways, and that is the thing that makes the emotional reaction a reaction that is as fresh today as it was in April of 2007. It is a wound that can't heal until we do something to heal the injury, to heal the problem.

I was thinking about this last night, and I was trying to, you know, think, what is some wisdom that I can derive to make me feel less down and less despondent? And I just thought of two things that I wanted to share. One is a spiritual insight, and the other is a practical reason not to lose hope.

So, as a spiritual insight, a few years ago, Pope Francis was kicking off a yearlong effort to encourage the revitalization of parish life—not the life of the big, universal church but the life of parishes. He challenged parishes, but this challenge could go for people, and it certainly could go for political leaders. He challenged parishes to be (statement made in Spanish) “islands of mercy in the midst of a sea of indifference,” and I thought, what an interesting challenge.

The thing about that challenge that I thought was so beautiful and a little bit unexpected is he didn't counterpose

mercy to evil or mercy to cruelty or mercy to hatred; he contrasted mercy with indifference—with indifference.

There is evil in the world, and there is hatred in the world, and there is cruelty in the world. Yet usually those forces are not strong enough to succeed for very long unless—unless—there is widespread indifference. We are challenged not to be indifferent.

If we assess why the Senate, this great deliberative body, has been unwilling to act for 15 years, I don't think it is cruelty or evil; it is indifference. It is the very thing that Pope Francis was warning us to avoid.

We should be merciful. We should not be indifferent. Evil doesn't thrive for very long absent indifference. Yet, despite what we often say after tragedies like this, with our thoughts and our prayers and our sincere emotions, if we don't demonstrate by more than just words that we are touched by these tragedies, then we are committing the sin of indifference.

I hope very much that the tragedy of these little children's deaths may push us out of the indifference that we have been sunk in at least on this issue. I really hope that it will.

Then, finally, there is a practical reason I am not going to give up hope that it will. I mentioned that I was the mayor of Richmond, dealing with a homicide problem, and that I was the Governor during what was at the time the worst mass shooting in the history of the United States. Sadly, it has been eclipsed. The Virginia Tech shooting is no longer the most tragic shooting in history. Others have eclipsed it in terms of the numbers of those killed.

I felt that same despair then, and I threw myself into trying to make changes. I made the changes in the Virginia laws that I could make as the Governor by executive action, but there are some things I couldn't do by executive action. I needed the support of my legislature to do a comprehensive background check bill because, in the case of the Virginia Tech shooting, Seung-Hui Cho, the disturbed 19-year-old who committed that crime, was legally barred from owning a weapon, but weaknesses in the background check system didn't catch that, and he was able to get the weapons that led to that carnage.

I couldn't get my legislature, even in the aftermath of the worst shooting in the history of the United States, to be willing to take action, but we never gave up. We kept pushing. We kept pushing in Virginia, the headquarters' State of the National Rifle Association. We kept pushing and pushing and pushing, and in 2019, 12 years after the tragedy at Virginia Tech, my legislature passed a set of commonsense gun safety rules: one handgun a month, a ban on certain kinds of weapons that nobody needs, a comprehensive background check, mental health support—a series of initiatives. My legislature did pass it in 2019, and my State is safer as a result, but 12 years was a

long time to wait. There were a lot of tragedies that happened between 2007 and 2019.

Thank God for the Virginia Tech family members and for the other advocates who said: We will wait. We are not going away. We are patient. We are discouraged. Each loss we feel afresh, but we are not stopping until we make that happen.

In my first months in the Senate, we voted on the floor on a comprehensive background check bill. I think that was the last time we had a meaningful debate about gun safety policy on the floor of this body—9 years ago. It is like there is a gag rule here. You know, it used to be, in Congress, you were not allowed to have debate or to vote about issues dealing with slavery during the 1830s. It is like we have a gag rule about debating gun safety on the floor of this body.

But I remember voting that day, and it was on the anniversary of the shooting at Virginia Tech that we voted on a bipartisan background check bill in this body in 2013. The Sandy Hook families were sitting in the Galleries, and many of the Virginia Tech families had come up to join them to offer them support. I was reminded of the Scripture and the letter of Paul to the Hebrews being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. And here we were on the floor, trying to respond to this tragedy and do something to ease their grief, and we fell a couple of vote shorts. We couldn't get to 60. I think we had 57 votes that day for a background check bill. That was painful. It was painful. It was especially painful to fall short in the view of all of these grieving family members.

But I draw hope from this. If we can make progress on this issue in Virginia—the headquarters of the NRA—we can make it in the U.S. Senate. It may not happen as quickly as I want, and it may not happen while I am still here to see it, but there is no reason to give up. If we can do this in Virginia, we can do this in the U.S. Senate, and we ought to. There is nothing we can do to bring back the lives of these young people, but if we can act to decrease the chance that this will ever happen again, they will at least have the ability to grab on and say: Our advocacy made a difference, and kids who go to school will be safer in the future.

This is the last thing I will say, and I will sit down. I was walking around the building this morning, and because I am fluent in Spanish and people around here know it—a lot of the Capitol staffers are Latinos, and they talk to me in Spanish—I passed by a longtime Capitol staffer who said in Spanish: Senator, what is going on? What is going on with this country?

I said: I know what you are asking me about, and it is such a tragedy.

Then she said this to me. She is from El Salvador. She said: My country is a mess, and the violence is awful, and the homicide rate is unacceptable, but no children in schools feel unsafe. No peo-

ple going to church services feel unsafe. What is going on, Senator?

I didn't have a good answer for her. I didn't have a good answer for her.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, last night, as I was doomscrolling—as they say one does at 2 in the morning when you can't sleep—what I was looking up were places to buy ballistic protective backpacks for my daughters, who are 4 and 7, and places to buy ballistic protective white boards, which could be donated to my girls' school, that would act as shields should a shooter go to their school. It is bad enough that I felt I had to do that, but the fact of the matter is, those pages were already bookmarked because it was not the first time that I have had to look them up.

Just 10 days, 240 hours, less than 2 weeks is all it took. It took just 10 days from the racially motivated domestic terrorism attack in Buffalo before we had to mourn the loss of yet more Americans—this time, 19 babies and 2 teachers—to a senseless, horrific, and, importantly, preventable mass shooting in Uvalde, TX. These were children gunned down at their school, with their small bodies mangled, utterly destroyed by lethal weapons of war that are designed to quickly kill adults.

So, last night when I got home, I held on to my two babies so tightly. They didn't know why, but I wasn't going to let them go. I was just so grateful they came home from school.

Today, there are at least 19 more families in our country that will never be able to forget the horrific site of what happens to a baby's body, to a child's body when shot at close range with an AR-15 or similarly styled rifle meant for battlefields and not schools.

I come to the floor today because, as a mother, I am beyond angry. I am furious, heartbroken, and fed up. I am sick to my stomach thinking about what those parents are feeling right now. They sent off their babies to school yesterday morning, just like I did. They packed their lunch, like I did. They argued with their babies about hurry up, the bus is coming. You are going to miss the bus. No, you really do have to wear a sweater. I know that you don't think it is cold, but you have to wear a sweater or today is PE day, and you have to wear your tennis shoes. But unlike my daughters, those babies never came home again. They will never laugh their beautiful laughs again. They will never smile their wild, silly, gorgeous smiles again. That is a hell on Earth I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy.

As a Senator, I ask my colleagues: How many more children will you allow to be murdered on your watch? How many more? How many more tiny bodies have to be ripped apart by weapons of war before you will stand up to the gun lobby and the NRA? How many

more children will you allow to go to school each day traumatized, fearing for their lives; children, terrified of being gunned down in their classrooms, practicing active shooter drills instead of studying their ABCs and 123s. When will it be enough for you to do something, anything, to simply do your job? When will children's lives matter more than your check from the gun lobby? When?

Last night, my colleague from Connecticut Senator MURPHY came to the floor to ask our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, "What are we doing?" But my Republican colleagues know exactly what they are doing. They know exactly what they are risking, whose lives they are endangering when they refuse to lift a finger in the wake of yet another mass shooting.

When the assault weapons ban was allowed to expire, the number of mass shooting deaths tripled—tripled. We know that the ban works, and we need to reinstate it.

Republicans are yet again pushing for nothing to be done, falling back on the old line that only one thing stops a bad guy with a gun, and that is a good guy with a gun, knowing full well that there were good guys with guns at both Uvalde and Buffalo. And here we are, mourning dozens of lives anyway.

And I have even heard some of them say let's equip the teachers with guns. I would rather equip teachers with more pieces of chalk and more learning tools than guns because even if those teachers had had a gun in the classroom, they didn't have a chance to react to go grab that gun, and they are dead today.

They pretend like all we can do is send thoughts and prayers or they say it is too soon to talk about politics. But they know that we don't have any time to wait. This time, we didn't even have 10 days to wait from Buffalo.

It is their job to do more than send thoughts and prayers. It is their job—our job—to prove that we care even the least little bit about those little bodies and the giant heartbreaks they leave behind.

We know how to stop these attacks from happening as often as they do. Heck, the entire rest of the world has figured it out. We all know there will be another and another and another attack in the weeks and months ahead if we do nothing. More innocent lives will undoubtedly be lost.

So if you are not willing to act, if you are not willing to do the most basic part of your job to prevent the senseless loss of innocent life, then again I ask, why are you here?

The Senate should immediately, at a 50-vote threshold, vote on the common-sense gun safety reforms that the American people have demanded for so long. And don't tell me this is about the filibuster because we have, time and again, voted at the 50-vote threshold on things that matter, like raising the debt ceiling or the defense budget. Yet the lives of our babies, the right of

our babies to not be torn apart by weapons meant for war is not worthy of that?

We are talking about universal background checks. We are talking about the kind of reforms that widespread majorities of Americans support. And in the face of yet another moment of unimaginable, unbearable, unfathomable grief, let's show the Nation that we value children's lives more than an arcane Senate procedure rule. Let's do what adults are supposed to do. Let's protect our kids, the most vulnerable, the most innocent. Let's do our jobs. Let's do what we were sent here to do, what our children are depending on us to do.

We owe it to each victim of this tragedy and every tragedy before it and their loved ones to finally act. Enough was enough a very, very long time ago. May those babies rest in peace, those little angels now in Heaven.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maine.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, shortly, the Senator from Rhode Island, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, will come to the Senate floor and attempt to have a live unanimous consent request for a nominee to be the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere. When he does so, Madam President, I intend to object to that request, and I want to explain why to my colleagues. Senator WHITEHOUSE has been delayed in getting to the Senate floor, so I am going to outline my objections prior to his making the request.

Madam President, in all of the time that I have served in the U.S. Senate, I don't ever recall coming to the Senate floor to object to a unanimous consent request. I say that because it demonstrates how unusual it is for me to be standing here objecting to one of my colleague's unanimous consent requests. Indeed, as I said, I don't believe I have ever done this in all of the time I have served in the Senate.

So let me give the Presiding Officer and my colleagues some background. On May 1, despite the objections of the entire Maine congressional delegation and its Democratic Governor, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, better known as NOAA, imposed onerous new regulations on Maine's lobster industry.

Now, Madam President, if I asked you what is the first thing you think of when I say the State of Maine, you probably would say lobster, our iconic industry. We have more than 4,500 lobstermen and -women, each of whom is self-employed. They have been good stewards, always, of the lobster resource. They have taken care over the decades to make sure that the lobsters are large enough, for example, to keep. They throw back egg-bearing lobsters. There are all sorts of rules and regulations that the lobster industry has worked with the State of Maine over

decades to preserve the precious resource.

But, now, in comes NOAA. NOAA is imposing onerous, possibly impossible new regulations that do not reflect the reality in the Gulf of Maine with regard to the right whale. The final rule imposed on May 1 does not even come close to reflecting the reality of the Maine fishing and lobstering industry and the endangered right whale.

NOAA's focus on the State of Maine's lobster industry is flawed and unfair. In fact, Madam President, the Agency's own data show that there has never, never been a right whale entanglement death attributed to the Maine lobster fishery.

NOAA denied an entirely reasonable request to at least delay the implementation of these onerous new regulations for just 2 months until July 1. The entire delegation, plus our Governor, asked for this delay, this 2-month delay, because our lobstermen cannot even find enough of the gear, the new gear that is being mandated by NOAA. Just a 2-month delay would have helped to prevent huge losses to these small business owners.

Now, this isn't the first request that NOAA has refused. We have worked over more than a year with NOAA to try to prevent these regulations from going into effect in the first place because they are not relevant to preserving the right whale. Nobody wants to see the population of right whales decimated, but if you look at the data, here is what is happening, Madam President. It is ship strikes that have been responsible for the death of right whales. They have occurred in the St. Lawrence Seaway in Canada, not even in the State of Maine.

In addition, there is evidence that there is some gear that is used for the Canadian snow crab that has been found to entangle the right whale. That is different from our lobster gear. And as I said, there has never been a right whale entanglement death attributed to the Maine lobster fishery.

So these regulations make no sense in the first place, but at least—in response to a plea from the lobster industry, from the Maine Department of Marine Resources, from the Democratic Governor of Maine, from the entire Maine delegation—at least NOAA could have answered our plea to delay these onerous regulations for 2 months—2 months—during which time maybe this brandnew, very expensive gear would have become more available. But, no. Once again, NOAA refused.

This really is outrageous, and the industry is expected to lose out on \$7 million due to lost fishing time during these 2 months.

Now, perhaps the Senator from Rhode Island and others do not believe what the Maine delegation, the Democratic Governor of Maine, the Maine Department of Marine Resources, and many experts are saying about the impact of these regulations and the lack

of availability of this new gear and the fact that the data show that we are not the problem in the State of Maine. As I said, it is fish strikes and due to warming waters, which I know is of great concern to the Senator from Rhode Island, as it is to me.

The right whale are actually moving and following their food supply into Canadian waters. In fact, I have talked to many lobstermen and -women who have never seen a right whale—never—in all the time that they have been lobstering. But as I said, maybe NOAA just thinks that we are just automatic advocates for an iconic industry, despite the extraordinary record of stewardship by the lobster industry.

So let me give you another source. Denying this 2-month extension conflicted with the recommendations of the U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Advocacy, an independent voice for small business within the Federal Government. The office of advocacy asserted that NOAA was putting lobstermen and -women in "an impossible scenario," and went on to say:

If they are not granted a short delay of the compliance deadline, they may stand to lose significant amounts of revenue, or in some instances, their entire business.

This isn't just the Maine delegation. It isn't just our Governor. It isn't just the Maine Department of Marine Resources. This is another government agency. It is the Small Business Administration's Office of Advocacy which is saying this.

Maine harvesters are justifiably worried about what they are going to do and I don't know what more the Maine delegation can do. We have had countless meetings with the Department of Commerce, with NOAA. I met with the Fisheries Administrator in NOAA. I asked for his help. He promised to work with us. Instead, things have gotten only worse. And now our lobster industry worries that NOAA will continue to steadily whittle away at their livelihoods while ignoring not only their on-the-water expertise, the expertise of the State of Maine, but the impartial advice of the Federal Government's Small Business Advocate as well.

The entire agency, all of NOAA, needs to recognize that the practice of implementing management decisions based on incomplete, imprecise, inaccurate data—especially when those decisions have a harmful effect on a fishery that is known for its conservation methods and on the communities that this fishery has supported forever in the State of Maine—cannot continue.

So that is the situation in which we find ourselves, and that is why I believe, for the first time in all the years that I have served in the Senate, I have come to the floor to object when the unanimous consent request is made.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I do not want to keep the distinguished Senator from Maine on the floor any longer than we have to, so I am going to move rapidly to the unanimous consent motion.